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CIA men covertly helped to train Libyan terrorists

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WASHINGTON—Some CIA employees provided support for the training of Libyan terrorists by former U.S. Green Berets four years ago but without the knowledge of the agency, a CIA spokesman said yesterday.

One of those involved in the operation is a former Green Beret who now lives on Oahu.

The CIA issued a statement that said there was no official encouragement or involvement by the intelligence agency in the training program.

The statement was issued in response to a New York Times story from Honolulu saying 10 men trained by the Army Special Forces went to work for the Libyan government in 1977, apparently believing they were infiltrating the Libyan government on behalf of the Central Intelligence Agency.

The Green Beret group was said to have included nine former Army Special Forces soldiers and Master Sgt. Luke F. Thompson of Kailua, Hawaii, who was then still on active duty.

The men went to Libya, the Times reported, believing they had Army endorsement and for a CIA operation.

Thompson, who retired from the Army in August 1978, confirmed to United Press International in Honolulu that he helped set up a training program for Libyan commandos believing he was on a CIA operation and that the Army had authorized his part in it.

The CIA yesterday denied official involvement.

Its statement read by a spokesman said Stansfield Turner, director of central intelligence in 1977, directed a thorough investigation when the information was first received indicating that former agency employee Edwin Wilson had engaged in alleged illegal activities.

The investigation established that there was no official encouragement or involvement by the CIA. Some employees were found to have provided support without agency knowledge and action was taken against them, it said.

It was understood that two CIA agents were fired as a result.

Wilson, said to have been ringleader of the operation and now believed living in Tripoli, Libya, was indicted in 1980 by a federal grand jury on charges of illegally exporting explosives to Libya.

A Pentagon spokesman said only that Thompson retired in 1978 and the matter of other persons involved was in the hands of the Justice Department. Justice Department sources said aspects of the case are still under investigation but declined to elaborate.

Thompson, in an interview with UPI in Honolulu, said he recruited a group of former Green Beret soldiers thinking the operation was part of a CIA effort to infiltrate the government of Libyan leader Moammar Khadafy.

He said his commanding officer in the Green Berets was aware of the mission and granted him a leave to undertake it.

Thompson said Wilson organized and financed the Libyan operation.

The affair started at Fort Bragg, N.C., in July 1977, he said, when he was called by a man who identified himself as Pat Loomis and asked if Thompson wanted to make big money on a contract.

Thompson said he immediately notified counterintelligence officials who told him to continue talking to Loomis and to report back to them.

When Loomis called back, he asked Thompson to pull together a team of men with experience covering all of the Green Berets' skills for an unspecified mission abroad, Thompson said.

Thompson said he and his men went to Libya and met with Abdul Sanuzi, head of Libyan intelligence.

Thompson said his men were told they were to train Libyan commandos, but he became suspicious of the operation and decided to head back home.

Once home, he reported to counterintelligence officers who told him "this thing is being investigated by the Justice Department." He said he was advised to "spill my guts out" to an FBI agent and did tell his story.

Contacted by The Advertiser yesterday, Thompson said he did not want to talk further about his involvement, but noted that this story by United Press International is "probably the most accurate of any so far."

He indicated that he still believes the covert operation he was sent upon four years ago had official government approval, despite the denials by officials in Washington.

"I think that's rather obvious," he said.

Thompson said the story surfaced several months ago when he was "coerced" into talking to a reporter for the Boston Globe under condition that his anonymity would be preserved and that he would have prior approval of the article before it was printed.

He said the reporter read him the story over the phone and the article used his name about 30 times. Thompson said he told the reporter he couldn't use the story, but it was printed anyway.

"It cost me a great deal of money to establish my anonymity," Thompson said. "This guy blew me to high heaven."

Recently the New York Times and the Associated Press have also carried stories based partly on Thompson's experiences.

His only objection to the UPI story was the use of the word "terrorists," he said. "I didn't say anything about terrorists."